

HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**Report**

Committee:	Economy, Transport and Environment Select Committee
Date:	16 April 2015
Title:	Parish Lengthsman Scheme
Reference:	6622
Report From:	Director of Economy, Transport and Environment

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1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. The recent report by the Select Committee's highway task and finish group on new ways of working during the extension period of the highways maintenance contract highlighted the popularity of the parish lengthsman pilot scheme. The Committee resolved in January this year to set up a future task and finish group on the lengthsman scheme to assist with the future appraisal of that scheme.
- 1.2. The purpose of this report is to provide the Committee with an overview of the parish lengthsman pilot scheme to aid discussions about a future task and finish working group.

2. Background

- 2.1. The history of parish lengthsman goes back to the early 1900s when lengthsman, who lived in their parishes, were given lengths of local highway and tasked to keep their sections of road in good condition. Over time, with greater mechanisation and declining budgets the service began to fall into decline and by the late 1960s had ceased to operate in Hampshire.
- 2.2. The decision to introduce a modern version of that service, initially as two pilot schemes in the Meon and Test Valley areas, which involved 19 parishes forming two clusters, was taken in April 2009. The areas were chosen partly because they previously reported relatively high numbers of service enquiries to local highway engineers but also because they benefitted from having active parish councils. Both pilot areas fell within single county council electoral divisions which was considered desirable given the important contribution local Elected Members could make as champions for the pilots and in the evaluation process that followed.
- 2.3. The aim of the scheme was to improve local responsiveness; reduce pressure on core highway services; and to enhance the local environment by

putting finance, labour and decisions about prioritising low-level highway maintenance under the direct control of parishes.

- 2.4. A list of duties which a parish lengthsman undertake is set out in Appendix 1. Whilst the duties include sign cleaning, drainage and minor highway works, for example cutting back vegetation and grass strimming, all of which fall under the responsibility of the County Council, the list also includes other environmental work, such as litter picking, graffiti removal, maintaining play areas, benches, bus shelters - all of which fall under the responsibility of district or and parish councils. Health and safety is paramount and therefore the scheme prohibits lengthsman from undertaking any structural repairs or any work on the 'live' carriageway, and from undertaking any work to street lighting or illuminated signs.
- 2.5. Funding is allocated to the 'lead parish' for each cluster, with a maximum of £1,000 per annum for each participating parish.

3. Learning from the initial pilots and expansion of the scheme

- 3.1. The timescales involved in setting up the initial pilots were longer than initially expected. Legal agreements need to be signed between both the County Council and the lead parish councils, and also between the lead parishes and each of their participating parishes. Public liability insurance of £10m also has to be set up by each lead parish and initial risk assessments had to be undertaken.
- 3.2. The initial pilots were reviewed in 2011 and the learning was used to improve a series of information sheets covering roles and responsibilities, health and safety, and legal documentation. There are published on [Hantsweb](#) and have been actively promoted to parishes who express interest by the Hampshire Association of Local Councils.
- 3.3. The initial pilots identified that the success of the scheme not only depends on having a reliable, well briefed and capable lengthsman, but also on timely communications between all parties involved. It also recognised the important role the lead parish plays in appointing the lengthsman, liaising with the participating parishes, and co-ordinating work schedules and providing feedback to the County Council.
- 3.4. Overall most parishes involved in the initial pilots regarded the scheme as valuable to their local areas and requested it be extended. This was agreed in September 2011. The Executive Member for Environment also agreed to allocate an additional 10% of the funding to the lead parish for administration costs and to expand the scheme to include clusters in South Winchester, New Forest and also a pilot in Fleet, which was the only urban lengthsman pilot and this receives £3,000 per year.
- 3.5. Since then the scheme has continued to grow in popularity with local parish councils. By 2014/15 ninety one out of Hampshire's 262 were involved in the pilots. In January 2015, the Executive Member for Economy, Transport and Environment agreed to continue the pilots and permit a further 24 parishes to join the scheme. A list of participating parishes is set out in Appendix 2, together with a map illustrating the clusters across the county which now

cross district boundaries and even include Alderholt parish in Dorset (funded by Dorset County Council) and some 'stand alone' pilots.

4. Finance

- 4.1. Current funding for the scheme remains at £1,000 per parish with the exception of Fleet Town Council which receives £3,000. Once the legal agreements have been signed, funding for each cluster is transferred from the County Council to the lead parish, which also now receive an additional 10% for administration costs.
- 4.2. The scheme continues to be funded entirely from the County Council's highway revenue maintenance budget which now faces unprecedented pressures and is required to make reductions by 2017.
- 4.3. Given the County Council's policies on revenue funding, monies cannot be rolled over to the next year or transferred to other parishes, even if a parish hasn't undertaken sufficient work to expend the full allocation during a year.
- 4.4. The total cost of the parish lengthsman scheme for 2015/16 is expected to be in the region of £130,000. If the current funding arrangements were to continue and the scheme was to expand to enable all of Hampshire's parish councils to participate, the cost would be approximately £290,000 per year.
- 4.5. In addressing parish councils in November last year, the Executive Member for Economy, Transport and Environment, advised parish councils that, unless the parishes themselves are willing to contribute to funding the scheme from their precept, or the County Council is able to help parishes find alternative outside sources of funding, it may well be impossible to retain the scheme on the current basis beyond 2015/16. Since then, the Executive Member requested the Department develops an options appraisal, in consultation with Hampshire Association of the Local Councils, for the continuation of the scheme post 2015/15.

5. Perception and Performance

- 5.1. Responses to a recent informal survey of lead parishes, indicates that the scheme remains popular with parishes as it enable them to direct highway resources to local priorities that could not be justified as core Highway Maintenance activities. All parishes are aware that the current funding arrangement is unlikely to be sustainable in the future given the financial pressures now facing the County Council. Some parishes have already indicated a willingness to consider adding to existing funds to have greater influence over the scheme.
- 5.2. In order to maximise efficiencies, the County Council is encouraging the 'stand alone' parish pilots to establish clusters or join existing clusters.
- 5.3. It is estimated that twenty to thirty per cent of works undertaken support district or parish responsibilities. The remainder enables low level minor works to be undertaken at a cheaper rate than would be achieved using the current Term Highway Contract. However, this does not necessarily mean it provides good value for money for the Highways Authority, given its priorities

and the need to address the overall management of the highway network in light of the Council's transformation programme.

- 5.4. Whilst, the County Council, as the Highway Authority, is under no obligation to maintain this level of local highway service, it values the goodwill which the scheme has generated in terms of improved partnership working. It also acknowledges the fact it has helped to a limited extent to ease the burden on the main highway service and has the potential to reduce further longer-term problems and costs.

6. Next Steps

- 6.1. A further report, setting an options appraisal and recommendations about the future of the scheme post 2015/16 is likely to be considered by the Executive Member in January 2016.
- 6.2. The Select Committee may wish to consider establishing a task and finish group to inform the Department's work over the next six months; draft terms of reference for such a group is set out in Appendix 3 for the Committee's consideration.

CORPORATE OR LEGAL INFORMATION:**Links to the Corporate Strategy**

Hampshire safer and more secure for all:	no
Corporate Improvement plan link number (if appropriate):	
Maximising well-being:	no
Corporate Improvement plan link number (if appropriate):	
Enhancing our quality of place:	yes
Corporate Improvement plan link number (if appropriate):	

Other Significant Links

Links to previous Member decisions:		
<u>Title</u>	<u>Reference</u>	<u>Date</u>
Parish Lengthsman Scheme Update	6392	20 th January 2015

Section 100 D - Local Government Act 1972 - background documents

The following documents discuss facts or matters on which this report, or an important part of it, is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. (NB: the list excludes published works and any documents which disclose exempt or confidential information as defined in the Act.)

<u>Document</u>	<u>Location</u>
None	

Impact Assessments

1. Equality Duty

1.1. The County Council has a duty under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 ('the Act') to have due regard in the exercise of its functions to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited under the Act;
- Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic (age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, gender and sexual orientation) and those who do not share it;
- Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

Due regard in this context involves having due regard in particular to:

- a) The need to remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons sharing a relevant characteristic connected to that characteristic;
- b) Take steps to meet the needs of persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic different from the needs of persons who do not share it;
- c) Encourage persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.

1.2. Equalities Impact Assessment:

This report provides information on current procedures for the select committee to consider. No changes are proposed in this report, therefore an impact assessment has not been undertaken. If any changes are recommended by the Select Committee as a result of this item, their impact will be considered when the recommendations go to the decision maker.

2. Impact on Crime and Disorder:

2.1. This report provides information on current procedures for the select committee to consider. No changes are proposed in this report, therefore an impact assessment has not been undertaken. If any changes are recommended by the Select Committee as a result of this item, their impact will be considered when the recommendations go to the decision maker.

3. Climate Change:

- a) How does what is being proposed impact on our carbon footprint / energy consumption?
- b) How does what is being proposed consider the need to adapt to climate change, and be resilient to its longer term impacts?

This report provides information on current procedures for the select committee to consider. No changes are proposed in this report, therefore an impact assessment has not been undertaken. If any changes are recommended by the Select Committee as a result of this item, their impact will be considered when the recommendations go to the decision maker.

Appendix 1

Duties Parish Lengthsmen may undertake.

Hampshire County Council	District Councils	Parish Councils
<p>Drainage:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Grips ■ Localised ditching ■ Cleaning channels ■ Rodding of pipes (off highway) <p>Signs excluding street name plates (including reflector posts):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Cleaning ■ Minor repairs ■ Speed Limit Reduction sign relocation <p>Highway Minor Works:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Removal of soil/detritus ■ Cutting back vegetation overhanging the road or footway ■ Clearing footways of weeds/moss ■ Removing vegetation from parapets or fences. ■ Highway grass strimming around posts ■ Reporting defects 	<p>Environmental:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Sweeping ■ Litter clearance ■ Removal of fly-posting ■ Land drainage (not highway) ■ Graffiti/unauthorised sign removal ■ Street name plates cleaning and repair ■ Repair of street furniture including litter bins, benches, bus stops ■ Reporting 	<p>Community:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Maintain public open spaces ■ Maintain public rights of way ■ Maintain play areas ■ Maintain playing fields ■ Maintain associated fences, styles etc. ■ Acting as eyes and ears for the community having regard to vulnerable parishioners and anti social behaviour such as noise, car crime etc. ■ Reporting

Due to the health and safety implications the Parish Lengthsman shall not undertake cleaning, repair or any work on:

- Street Lighting
- Illuminated signs and bollards (i.e. any street furniture with an electrical connection)
- The live road, and,
- Patching and structural repairs (no excavation due to possibility of underground apparatus)
- Emergency call-outs to highway incidents.

